2020 VCE Russian oral examination report

General comments

The Russian oral examination assesses students’ knowledge and skills in using spoken language. The examination has two sections – a Conversation of approximately 7 minutes, during which students converse with the assessors about their personal world, and a Discussion of approximately 8 minutes.

Following the Conversation, the student will indicate to the assessor(s) the subtopic chosen for detailed study and, in no more than one minute, briefly introduce the main focus of their subtopic, alerting assessors to any objects brought to support the discussion. Suitable objects include photographs, maps or diagrams, and should include no text or very little text. The support material must have minimal writing, which includes only a heading, name or title.

The one-minute introduction should give assessors an indication of the area of discussion. The purpose is for students to briefly introduce their chosen subtopic; it is not an opportunity for students to list all their information or texts.

The focus of the Discussion is to explore aspects of the language and culture of communities in which Russian is spoken, with the student being expected to make reference to the texts studied.

The choice of subtopic for the Detailed Study is very important. It should be an engaging topic that motivates students to become familiar with the content and vocabulary needed, and thus be more skilled to support and elaborate on information, ideas and opinions. It is important that students and teachers select materials for the Detailed Study carefully so that students are exposed to a variety of views. The type of texts used by students should vary in complexity and be in Russian so that students can become aware of key vocabulary related to their subtopic. Students are reminded that they must be prepared to use language spontaneously in unrehearsed situations. Students should be able to draw on the texts they have studied and make links between the texts to support, expand on and explore opinions and ideas on the subtopic and different aspects of the texts. Students should be able to relate this to the Russian-speaking community.

Students are not expected to be ‘experts’; they are expected to have learnt strategies in order to respond to unexpected questions. It would be valuable for students to learn phrases such as, ‘I have not studied this aspect of the topic, but I think …’, ‘I don’t know, but I feel …’ and ‘I am not sure about this question but I know …’

It should be noted that during the oral examination:

* students may be asked a variety of questions of varying levels of difficulty. Questions may also be asked in a different order from the one students anticipate
* assessors may interrupt students to ask questions during either section of the examination; this should be regarded as a normal process in a discussion
* assessors may also repeat or rephrase questions
* normal variation in assessor body language is acceptable.

Three criteria are used in assessing both the Conversation and the Discussion: communication, content and language. Details of the assessment criteria and descriptors are published on the VCAA website. It is important that all teachers and students be familiar with the criteria and descriptors and that students use them as part of their examination preparation. This will help students to engage in a lively and interesting  
  
exchange with assessors. Although there are similarities between the assessment criteria for the Conversation and Discussion sections of the examination, the criteria assess two very different aspects of performance. Students who are well prepared are generally able to demonstrate their abilities and proficiency in the language.

Specific information

Section 1: Conversation

General conversation on personal topics (such as friends, school life, family life, lifestyle, travelling, hobbies, future aspirations, learning languages, environment, young generation problems) allowed students to demonstrate their language skills; range and appropriateness of vocabulary and grammar; clarity of expression; depth of information; and capacity to elaborate on ideas and opinions.

Students would benefit from anticipating the types of questions that might arise in response to the opinions and ideas they express and from practising appropriate responses.

Some students had difficulty:

* evaluating information and answering questions such as How would you compare …? Can you explain why you take this position? Can you explain the value of …?
* analysing information and answering questions such as How would you explain/justify/solve …? What is the relationship between …?
* applying and transferring informationand answering questions such as What would happen if …? How would you change that and why? Using what you already know, can you predict …?

Most students were comfortable with comprehension questions and recalling information and facts.

High scores were awarded to responses that elaborated on ideas, expressed opinions, provided examples, and gave reasons, summaries and comparisons.

Most students demonstrated good communication skills. They responded with confidence, asked for clarification and repetition; many students needed minimal support.

Students generally demonstrated good pronunciation, intonation, stress and tempo. Students were awarded lower marks when they demonstrated a limited vocabulary, employed a limited range of expressions and used limited language structures. Students are reminded to carefully consider appropriateness of style and register.

Section 2: Discussion

Some students demonstrated a good level of preparation: a good choice of subtopics led to interesting discussions, exchanges of opinions, the expression of views and the use of examples from the texts studies to defend and clarity opinions and ideas.

Students were good at choosing descriptive and informative subtopics but found it challenging to offer topics that could lead to a discussion, and they were therefore not able to elaborate on ideas and opinions.

Resources were not always chosen carefully. Some students relied on personal experiences rather than on research, which meant they were unable to provide a good range of interesting ideas or opinions and back these up with good examples or evidence from texts. These students needed a lot of support and would have benefitted by preparing strategies for carrying the discussion forward more effectively.

Students are advised to improve their range of vocabulary, sentence structure and expressions, complex sentences, and appropriateness of style and register.

Some students should improve their knowledge of grammar. Typical errors were incorrect use of pronouns, word formation, cases, prepositions, verb endings, tenses, use of passive voice, and conditional sentences, as well as commonly used phrases and word groups.